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WORKING GROUP III

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Statement by the Chairman of Working Group III, Mr. Mohammad Ali Aghassi (Iran) at the first meeting of the Working Group held on 2[illegible] February 1968 1/

1. At the outset, I wish to thank most warmly the distinguished representatives of India, Afghanistan and Bulgaria for having proposed and seconded my name to the office of Chairman. May I also express the gratitude of the delegation of Iran to this distinguished Working Group for the honour it has accorded my country.

2. The decision of the Conference to allocate agenda item 3(g) - Special Problems of the Land-locked Countries - to Working Group III, may be taken as an indication of the importance which the Conference attaches to this problem. The task of our Group will, in my opinion, consist of the following:- firstly, to identify some of the problems which impede the promotion of trade and economic development of the land-locked countries; secondly, to consider some measures designed to overcome the difficulties involved; and thirdly, to formulate our conclusions and/or recommendations for submission to the Conference.

3. The special problems of the land-locked countries are not new; they are as old as the countries themselves. However, in the past several decades these problems have assumed increasing importance, requiring special international attention for their solution. The urgency of the problem may be viewed within the context of several inter-related and dynamic factors: (a) the independence recently acquired by many of the developing land-locked States has placed upon them the responsibility for the social and economic development of their countries in order to satisfy, at least to some extent, the needs and rising expectations of their growing populations; (b) the revolutionary progress made in international communications has highlighted the growing disparity between the rich lands and the poor lands and has awakened the consciousness among the latter for accelerated social and economic development; and (c) the increasing inter-dependence of the world economy and the growing needs of the developing land-locked countries for a greater share in international trade has intensified the problems of those countries.

1/ Circulated at the request of the Working Group.

4. The problems before the Working Group may be conceived as composed of two main aspects:

(i) The first aspect is the traditional one, and it is of a rather legal character. As enunciated by the First Conference in Principle One related to Transit Trade, this aspect concerns the recognition of the right of each land-locked country, whether developed or developing, to free access to the sea. Its antecedents go back as far as 1921, to the Barcelona Convention of Freedom of Transit which was concluded under the auspices of the League of Nations. As the distinguished representatives are aware, in 1957 the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 1028 (XI) invited Member States "to give full recognition to the needs of land-locked Member States in the matter of transit trade and, therefore, to accord them adequate facilities in forms of International law and practice in this regard."

It may also be recalled that the action taken by UNCTAD in 1964 took note of the ECAFE resolution 51 (XX) which the Commission had adopted on the subject the previous year. The First UNCTAD dealt with this aspect of the problem and unanimously adopted decisions which culminated, in 1965, in the Convention of Transit Trade of Land-locked States. The Convention entered into force in 1967, thanks to the ratification of ten land-locked and two transit countries. The Convention is open for accession without time limit and the present state of ratification is given in the Secretariat document TD/II/WG.III/L12 and Corr.1, which is now before the Working Group;

(ii) The second aspect of the problem, which is economic in nature within the purview of the general problems of economic development of the developing countries, was stressed at the First Conference by a number of delegations. That Conference unanimously considered, inter alia, that for the promotion of economic development of the land-locked States, it is essential to provide facilities to enable them to overcome the effects of their land-locked situation on their trade". It may also be noted that since the First Conference, some of the regional economic commissions and sub-regional economic organizations of the developing countries have initiated studies on the subject.

5. As for the documentation before this Working Group, we have a number of documents listed by the Secretariat in document TD/II/WG.III/L.1. At the plenary meetings of the Conference, some delegations as well as the Secretary-General of UNCTAD have made statements relating to the agenda item 9(g). For the discussion in our Group, the Secretariat has prepared a document (TD/II/WG.III/Conf.Room Paper No.1) which contains

the most important excerpts related to the item. Also of interest to us will be the statements made at the plenary meetings in connexion with the problem of the least developed countries. The relevant excerpts are included in another document compiled by the Secretariat (TD/II/WG.II/Conf.Room Paper No.3) which is available to the delegations. The list also includes the Charter of Algiers (document TD/38) which, in Part Two, Chapter E, Section 6, calls for the establishment of a group of experts "in order to carry out a comprehensive examination of the special problems involved in the promotion of trade and economic development of the land-locked developing countries." May I also draw attention to the Secretariat Paper TD/17, on special measures to be taken in favour of the least developed among the developing countries. Section E of this document draws particular attention to the needs of land-locked countries.

Organization of Work

At this juncture it might be useful to have a short discussion on the organization of our work. As the distinguished representatives are aware, the main committees and working groups of the Conference are expected to complete their work by 16 March at the latest, so that the plenary may take up their reports during the week of 18 March. Furthermore, there is a limitation on the number of meetings each sessional body may have in the time remaining to us.

Working Group III has been allocated 8 meetings, the first of which we are holding now. We may expect to have a second meeting on Friday afternoon of this week, three or four meetings during the week of 4 March and the remaining three or two meetings during the week of 11 March. Due to the heavy demand for conference room space on the part of the main committees, working groups, contact groups of each committee as well as of the regional groups, it may be necessary for our Working Group to meet on a few occasions at night.

Under the circumstances, I would venture to suggest that we should take note of the statements already made in the plenary meetings on the subject before us, so that our general discussion may concentrate on the recommendations which we would submit to the Conference. Of course, the distinguished delegations will be free to make any additional statements as they wish. However, in order to make the best use of the little time at our disposal, you might wish to consider whether, in our general discussion, we should confine ourselves, whenever possible, to statements on the recommendations which we would make to the Conference at the conclusion of our work.

It would be helpful if we could limit our general discussion to two or, at the most, three meetings, and if delegations wishing to make statements could inscribe their names with the Secretariat as soon as possible.